

*Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2010*

**Remarks at a Reception for Senatorial Candidate Alexi Giannoulias in Chicago, Illinois**

*October 7, 2010*

*The President.* Hello, Chicago! Oh, it's good to be home! It is good to be home. Got all my friends—all my friends in the house.

*Audience member.* Long time no see.

*The President:* Long time no see.

It is wonderful to see—I see so many familiar faces here. Just a couple of people I've got to make mention of. First of all, he may be in my remarks, but I just want to say that there is nobody who was a better partner to me when I was in the United States Senate, nobody who is a better friend to working families here in Illinois, and nobody who is a better debater on the floor of the United States Senate than the man to my left, Dick Durbin. So love Dick Durbin. Love Dick Durbin. I love Loretta Durbin more. [*Laughter*] But Dick Durbin I love.

We also—if I'm not mistaken, we've got the junior Senator from Illinois, Roland Burris, in the house. Where's Roland? There he is right there. Appreciate Roland for his outstanding service.

We've got the next Lieutenant Governor of the great State of Illinois, Sheila Simon, who, by the way, knows a little bit about good Senators. Congressman Danny Davis is in the house. Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky is here—love Jan. Attorney General Lisa Madigan is here. Comptroller Dan Hynes is here. Senate President John Cullerton is here. The next treasurer, Robin Kelly is in the house. The next comptroller, David Miller is in the house.

Now, I see everybody else here. [*Laughter*] But if I started naming everybody I know I'm in trouble. So I've just got to stop—[*laughter*—except to say that it's also nice to be standing here with the next Senator from the great State of Illinois, Alexi Giannoulias.

Alexi is my friend. I know his character. I know how much he loves this country. I know how committed he is to public service. He has been a great advocate on behalf of the people of Illinois, and he's in this for the right reasons. He's not in it for the special interests; he's in it for your interests. You may not always agree with him, but you always know where he stands. He's comfortable in his own skin. He doesn't shift with the wind. He doesn't pretend to be something that he's not. You know who he is today and who he'll be tomorrow, and that's important. You can trust him. You can count on him.

And let me just also say—because I play basketball with him—[*laughter*—and I have still some sore ribs to prove it—he's a competitor. And we've seen that in this campaign. He just keeps on plowing ahead, because he knows that he wants to serve. In some very tough circumstances, in a tough political season, he has not wavered. And that's the kind of person that you want. That's the kind of person that you know, when the going gets tough in Washington, will be fighting for you.

So I hope you're fired up in these last few weeks. I need you to be fired up. Fired up and ready to go. I need it. I need that because there is an election—in case you were curious—[*laughter*—on November 2—an election—you can begin voting next week—that's going to say a lot about the future, your future and the future of our country. So you've got to be fired up.

Now, this is Chicago, so I know politics is—this is sport right here. *[Laughter]* I mean, I know everybody is paying attention. By the way, have you seen my Chief of Staff? *[Laughter]* I was like, looking around, it's like, what happened? *[Laughter]*

Two years ago, you defied the conventional wisdom in Washington, because they said you couldn't overcome the cynicism of our politics. You couldn't overcome the special interests. You can't make big progress on big issues. Can't happen. They said, "No you can't."

What did you say?

*Audience members.* Yes we can!

*The President.* You said, yes we can.

But sometimes I feel as if we had such a high on election night and then there was the Inauguration and Bono was singing and Beyonce and—*[laughter]*—everybody from Chicago went to Washington and was having a big party. But I have to remind you that the victory in that campaign didn't deliver the change that we needed. It just gave us the chance to make change happen. That was the start, not the finish, of the journey. And it made each of you a shareholder in the mission of rebuilding our country and reclaiming our future. And I'm back today because 2 years later, the success of that mission is at stake.

After that last election, it was my hope that we could pull together, Democrats and Republicans, and start dealing with the worst crisis we had seen since the Great Depression. That was my fervent hope because we may be proud Democrats, but we're prouder to be Americans. And there are Republicans across the country who feel the same way.

But the Republicans in Washington, they had a different idea. They knew it was going to take more than 2 years to climb out of this mess that they had created. They knew that by the time of this election, the midterm election, that there would still be people out of work; that people would be frustrated. And they figured if they just sat on the sidelines and just said no, opposed every idea I offered or Dick offered or Jan offered or Danny offered, if they spent all their time attacking Democrats instead of attacking our problems, then they'd have a chance to prosper at the polls. That was their calculation.

And they just spent the last 20 months saying no, even to policies that they had supported in the past. They said no to middle class tax cuts. They said no to help for small businesses. They said no to a bipartisan deficit reduction commission that they had cosponsored. And when I was for it, suddenly they were against it. If I said the sky was blue, they said no. *[Laughter]* If I said there were fish in the sea. No. Their calculation was if Obama fails, we win. They were very explicit about it.

Now, they figured that that political game would get them through an election. But I knew it wasn't going to get America through the crisis. So I made a different calculation. I made a different choice. I took whatever steps were necessary to stop the economic freefall—with the help of people like Dick, with the help of people like Jan and Danny—even if those measures were not popular, even if they were not easy. Because you did not send me to Washington to do what was easy. You didn't send me to put my finger out to the wind and measure which way the wind was blowing and try to figure out how to stay in office. You elected me to do what was right. That's why you sent me.

So 20 months later, we no longer face the possibility of a second depression. Our economy is growing again. The private sector has created jobs for 8 months in a row. There are 3 million

Americans who wouldn't be working today if it weren't for the economic plan we put into place.

When we came in—when I flew in on Air Force One and we landed at O'Hare, there were a group of folks greeting us there. And there were a group of folks who had gotten jobs directly as a consequence of the Recovery Act. And so we know that we did the right thing.

But, look, we've still got a long way to go. Because the hole that we're climbing out of is so deep, there are still millions of Americans without work. The 6 months before I was sworn in we had lost 4 million jobs. We lost 750,000 the month I was sworn in; 600,000 the 2 months subsequent after that. And so most of the 8 million jobs we lost were before any of our economic plans took effect. And that means we've got a big hole to fill. There are still millions of families who can barely pay the bills or make a mortgage. Middle class families who were struggling to get by before the crisis hit are still treading water.

So of course people are frustrated. Of course people are impatient. I'm impatient. But the other side decided, we're just going to try to ride that anger, that frustration, to the ballot box, without offering any serious ideas about how to solve our problems. And now the pundits are saying, well, the other party's supporters, they're more excited. They say all of you who worked so hard in 2008 might not be as excited this time; you might not be as energized; you might not care as much; that you don't mind if the same politicians and policies that created this mess, left the economy in a shambles, return to Washington. That's what the pundits are predicting. They're basically counting on you all having amnesia. *[Laughter]*

But I think they're wrong, Chicago. And it's up to you to prove them wrong. It's up to you to defy the conventional wisdom once again. It's up to you to show the pundits that you love this country too much to let it fall backwards; you are ready to move forward. You've got to show them that you're ready to fight for our future.

Because this election is a choice. Don't—no mistaking the situation here. The choice could not be clearer. Because it's not as if the Republicans, they went off into the desert and meditated after 2008, and they said, "Boy, what did we do wrong? We got this—as a consequence of our stewardship, the whole economy is in meltdown." That's not what they did. They didn't come back with a set of new ideas. They haven't changed their agenda since the last time they ran Washington. The chairman of one of their campaign committees promised that if Republicans take control of Congress, they will follow—and I'm quoting—"the exact same agenda" they pursued during the last administration.

And we know what that agenda was: You cut taxes, mostly for millionaires and billionaires; you cut regulations for special interests; you cut investments in education and clean energy, in research and development and technology. So basically, you just put blind faith in the market; we let corporations play by their own rules; we leave everybody else to fend for themselves, and somehow America is going to prosper.

Here's the thing, though. We know what happened. It's not as if we didn't try that. We tried it for 8 years. It didn't work. It didn't work for middle class families who saw their incomes fall—wages went down 5 percent between 2001 and 2009—when they were in power. That's not according to me; that's according to the Wall Street Journal. Job growth was slower during that period than any decade since World War II.

These guys are talking about jobs now? They had 8 years and it didn't work. They took a record surplus left by President Bill Clinton and it became a record deficit by the time I took

office, a big \$1.3 trillion present they left me as I walked in the Oval Office. They set up a free-for-all on Wall Street that led to a crisis that we're still grappling with today.

Now, I bring up all these things not to relitigate the past. I just don't want to relive the past. And I bring this up because that is the philosophy that Republicans like Alexi's opponent intend to bring back if they win in November. Now, they might have a new name for it. They call it the "Pledge to America." [Laughter] The "Pledge to America," it's the same stuff they've been peddling for years. [Laughter] They're trying to hoodwink you once again.

Let's take a look at the "Pledge to America." Some of you may not have examined it. [Laughter] Now, for starters, it turns out that part of the pledge was actually written by a former lobbyist for AIG and ExxonMobil. You cannot—yes—[laughter]—you can't make this stuff up. [Laughter] So that gives you a clue of who they're making the pledge to.

Then the centerpiece of this pledge is a \$700 billion tax cut for the wealthiest 2 percent of Americans. That is their big idea. Now, these are the folks who lecture us on fiscal responsibility, so I have to point out we don't have \$700 billion. We'd have to borrow \$700 billion—from the Chinese or the Saudis—and then use it to provide tax cuts worth an average of \$100,000 to millionaires and billionaires.

When you ask them, well, where are you going to find the \$700 billion, they don't have an answer. But when you look at the fine print, it turns out that a small portion of the tax cut they want to pay for by cutting education by 20 percent—20 percent—which would translate into reduce financial aid for 8 million college students. At a time when education is the biggest predictor of a country's economic success, they think it's more important to provide these tax breaks to folks who don't need them, weren't asking for them, than it is to make sure that our young people can get to college, which makes me want to ask our Republican friends, do you think China is cutting back on education? Do you think South Korea is making it harder for its citizens to get a college education? These countries are not playing for second place. And the United States of America does not play for second place. We play for first. That's what this election is about. That's what this election is about.

See, Alexi and I have a different idea about what the next 2 years should look like. It's an idea rooted in our belief about how this country was built. We know government doesn't have all the answers to all of our problems. We don't believe government's main role is to create jobs or prosperity. We believe government should be lean and efficient and that the private sector should be creating jobs. We want to reduce the deficit, which is why we've proposed a 3-year spending freeze and we set up that bipartisan fiscal commission to deal with our deficit that the other side voted against.

But we also believe in America we reward hard work and responsibility. We believe this is a country where we look after one another; that we are our brother's keeper, our sister's keeper. That's the America I know. That's the choice in this election.

So instead of tax cuts for millionaires and billionaires, we want to make permanent tax cuts for middle class Americans because folks who work hard every day, they deserve a break. Instead of the Republican plan to keep tax breaks for companies that are shipping jobs overseas, we want to give tax breaks to companies that are investing here in the United States of America, to small businesses and American manufacturers and clean energy companies. I don't want solar panels and wind turbines and electric cars made in Europe and Asia. I want them built here, in the United States, by American workers.

If Republicans take back Congress, they will try their hardest to give back power to the same special interests that me and Dick and Jan and Danny have been fighting for the last 20 months. We can't let them do that. We can't go back to the days when insurance companies could drop your health insurance when you got sick. We can't go back to the day when credit cards could jack up your rates for no reason. We can't go back to the days of taxpayer-funded bailouts. We can't allow special interests to take free rein again.

That's why I'm proud to be standing next to Alexi. He's made it clear he'll fight for you in the United States Senate. He's not funding his campaign with Federal PACs or lobbyist money. On his first day in office, he enacted the most sweeping ethics reforms of any Illinois State treasurer, ensuring that contractors and banks couldn't "pay to play" for State business. He took on credit card companies and banned them from aggressively marketing on college campuses, so that our kids don't graduate with credit card debt on top of tuition debt.

And a lot of you know what he did for Hartmarx, which, by the way, made this suit. It's a company that's employed people in this State for more than a hundred years. And when it fell on hard times, and a big bank threatened to pull its credit, risking more than 600 jobs, Alexi stepped in. He told that bank if they did that they'd no longer manage the money of Illinois taxpayers. He helped save that company, those jobs. They can testify about who he's going to fight for, who he cares about.

That's the kind of person you want in the United States Senate, somebody who doesn't forget where they came from, why they're in this, who they're fighting for. Somebody who does not stop fighting, period, because there's too much at stake right now to give up the fight.

So it comes down to this, Chicago. There are a lot of folks in the other party who are running today who are the same folks who drove this economy into the ditch. And me and the rest of the Democrats here in Washington, we climbed down into that ditch. We put on our boots. It was muddy. It was hot. [Laughter] There's bugs. [Laughter] But we pushed and we pushed and we pushed. And every once in a while we'd look up and see the Republicans up there, looking comfortable, fanning themselves, sipping on Slurpees. [Laughter] And we'd say, "Why don't you come down and help?" And they'd say, "No, but you're not pushing hard enough. You're not pushing the right way." [Laughter] And we just kept on pushing. And finally we got the car up on level ground. Finally we got it on level ground.

Now, it's gone through some trauma, so the fender is all dented, needs a tuneup. [Laughter] But it's on level ground, it's pointing in the right direction. And suddenly we feel this tap on our shoulder, and we look back and it's the Republicans. And we say, "What do you want?" They say, "We want the keys back." [Laughter]

And you tell them, "No, you can't have the keys back. You don't know how to drive!" You do not know how to drive. You can join us. You can hop in the backseat. [Laughter] But we're not giving you the keys back.

Have you ever noticed when you drive, you want to go forward, what do you do? You put the car in "D." If you want to go backwards, you put it in "R." [Laughter] That's not a coincidence. Not a coincidence.

But whether they get the keys back is ultimately up to you. They see a chance to get back in the driver's seat with the special interests riding shotgun. And thanks to a recent Supreme Court decision, they're being helped along by special interest groups that are spending unlimited amounts of money all on attack ads, and they don't disclose who's behind the ads. It could be an oil industry, could be an insurance company, could be Wall Street, you don't know.

Almost every one of them is run by Republican operatives. They're posing as nonprofits, nonpolitical groups. They've got these innocuous-sounding names like Americans for Prosperity or the Committee for Truth in Politics or Moms for Motherhood. [Laughter] I made that last one up. [Laughter] But you wouldn't know. [Laughter]

According to one recent report, conservatives—conservative groups like these have outspent Democrats 7 to 1. Right here in Illinois, in this Senate race, two groups funded and advised by Karl Rove have outspent the Democratic Party 2 to 1 in an attempt to beat Alexi—2 to 1. Funded and advised by Karl Rove. Just this week, we learned that one of the largest groups paying for these ads regularly takes in money from foreign sources.

So the question for the people of Illinois is, are you going to let special interests from Wall Street and Washington and maybe places beyond our shores come to this State and tell us who our Senator should be?

*Audience members.* No!

*The President.* That's not just a threat to Democrats. That's a threat to our democracy. The American people deserve to know who's trying to sway their election. And if we just stand by and allow special interests to silence anybody who's got the guts to stand up against them, our country is going to be a very different place. That's not how our democracy operates.

So that's why we've got to work even harder in this election. That's why we need to fight their millions of dollars with millions of voices who are ready to finish what we started in 2008. Because if everybody who fought for change in 2008 shows up to vote in 2010, we will win. And by the way, most of the polls say the same thing. Alexi will win. Pat Quinn will win. The entire ticket will win.

So they are counting on you staying home and being apathetic. They're counting on your silence. They are counting on your amnesia. That's what they're counting on.

So, Chicago, prove them wrong. Let's show Washington one more time change doesn't come from the top, it doesn't come from millions of dollars of attack ads. Change happens from the bottom up. Change happens because of you.

And if you get fired up one more time, if you're knocking on doors and making phone calls and talking to your friends and going to in the barbershops, going in the beauty shops, I promise you we will have Alexi as the next Senator from the great State of Illinois.

Thank you very much. God bless you, and God bless the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:15 p.m. at the Drake Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Loretta S. Durbin, wife of Senator Richard J. Durbin of Illinois; former White House Chief of Staff Rahm I. Emanuel; entertainers Paul D. "Bono" Hewson and Beyonce G. Knowles; Rep. Pete Sessions; Sen. Mark S. Kirk; former lobbyist Brian Wild; former White House Deputy Chief of Staff Karl C. Rove; and Gov. Patrick J. Quinn III of Illinois.

*Categories:* Senatorial candidate Alexi Giannoulias, reception in Chicago, IL.

*Locations:* Chicago, IL.

*Names:* Burris, Roland W.; Clinton, William J.; Cullerton, John J.; Davis, Danny K.; Durbin, Loretta S.; Durbin, Richard J.; Emanuel, Rahm I.; Giannoulias, Alexi; Hewson, Paul D. "Bono"; Hynes, Daniel W.; Kelly, Robin; Knowles, Beyonce G.; Madigan, Lisa; Miller, David;

Quinn, Patrick J., III; Rove, Karl C.; Schakowsky, Janice D.; Sessions, Pete; Simon, Sheila; Wild, Brian.

*Subjects:* Budget, Federal : Appropriations :: Education, Department of; Budget, Federal : Deficit and national debt; Budget, Federal : Deficit Reduction Commission; Budget, Federal : Deficit reduction commission, proposed :: Congressional establishment; Budget, Federal : Government programs, spending reductions; Business and industry : Credit cards, regulations and consumer protections; Business and industry : Domestic investment, proposed tax breaks for; Business and industry : Manufacturing industry :: Strengthening efforts; Business and industry : Small businesses :: Promotion efforts; Economy, national : American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009; Economy, national : Household incomes, decline; Economy, national : Improvement; Economy, national : Recession, effects; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Education, Department of : Funding; Elections : 2010 congressional elections; Elections : Campaign finance laws; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Employment and unemployment : Job losses; Energy : Alternative energy products and technologies, U.S. production; Energy : Solar and wind energy; Health and medical care : Insurance coverage and access to providers; Illinois : Governor; Illinois, Democratic Party events; Illinois, President's visit; Taxation : Tax cuts, budgetary effects; Taxation : Tax relief.

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